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ABSTRACT

The Family Life Early Education Project (FLEEP) operated from September 1993 through August 1994 in Chicago public schools. The project sought to assist parents in acquiring skills that foster their young children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development, thus increasing children's readiness for school. To accomplish these goals, the program: (1) advised parents about the educational, health, and human service resources available to them; (2) provided opportunities for them to interact with their children through field trips, small-group discussions, workshops, and child-parent interaction projects that encouraged the children's growth; and (3) worked to quickly detect any potential problems that might adversely affect children and their families. In evaluating the project, observers monitored program activities, surveyed 351 participating parents, interviewed the service providers, and reviewed program attendance and activity records. The results indicated that the program successfully met its goals. Not only did parents and prospective parents see themselves as better equipped to nurture and encourage their young children, they directly attributed these changes to attending FLEEP workshops, classes, and discussion groups. (AA)

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REPORT

RESEARCH, EVALUATION & PLANNING

ED 383 464

FAMILY LIFE EARLY EDUCATION PROJECT (Model Parent Training Program) EVALUATION REPORT

Fiscal 1994

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**FAMILY LIFE EARLY EDUCATION PROJECT
(Model Parent Training Program)**

Fiscal 1994

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PROGRAM FACTS

Title:	Family Life Early Education Project (FLEEP).
Program Purpose:	To assist parents in acquiring skills that foster their young children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development, thus increasing children's readiness for school.
Program Features:	Five service providers (two public schools and three not-for-profit agencies) offered classes, field trips, small-group discussions, workshops and child-parent interaction projects to inform and educate parents about child health and development, family issues, parenting skills, safety, and nutrition.
Participants Served:	351 parents
Eligibility Requirements:	Single and married adults expecting their first child within three months or whose young children are not yet served by early intervention programs.
Staffing:	Each agency provided the staff necessary to implement the program. Generally, staff consisted of one or two early childhood specialists, a clerical assistant, and social service staff. Agencies also worked with bilingual/bicultural and medical staff as needed.
Locations:	Chinese American Service League, Inc.; Erikson Institute outreach programs at William W. Carter School and the Woodson South School; Family Focus, Inc.-West Town; Mahalia Jackson School; and Tesla Alternative High School for Girls.
Funding Source:	Illinois State Grant
First Year of Funding:	1989
Funding Level:	\$174,716.09
Evaluation Period:	September 1993 - August 1994

EVALUATION SUMMARY

The Family Life Early Education Project (FLEEP), a program for parent education funded by the State of Illinois, operated from September 1993 through August 1994 by the Chicago Public Schools' Department of Early Childhood Education in cooperation with Chinese American Service League (a not-for-profit, community-based social service agency), Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development, Family Focus, Inc. (a private, not-for-profit family resource program), Mahalia Jackson School, and the Tesla Alternative High School for Girls (both Chicago public schools).

The project sought to enhance participants' self-esteem, build their confidence as parents, and encourage them to use parenting techniques promoting cognitive, social, physical, and emotional well-being in children, thus increasing the likelihood that their children will be better prepared for school. To accomplish these goals, the program advised parents about the educational, health, and human service resources available to them; provided opportunities for them to interact with their children through activities that encouraged the children's growth; and worked to quickly detect any potential problems that might adversely affect children and their families.

In evaluating the project, observers monitored program activities, surveyed participating parents, interviewed the service providers, and reviewed program attendance and activity records.

The following summarizes the major findings:

- A total of 351 parents participated in this program.
- The majority of participants were single parents with some high school education but without a diploma, earned less than \$7,500 per year, and identified themselves as African-Americans.
- Almost half the participants were under 20 years of age.
- Over 15 percent of the participants were expecting their first child, with over one-third having more than one child under the age of five.
- After participating in the program, 81 percent of the respondents reported knowing more about how to set limits with their children.
- More than 90 percent of the responding parents commented that they better understood which activities were age-appropriate for their children.
- Three-quarters of the respondents felt more confident in their role as their children's most important teacher.
- Over 80 percent responded that they now spent more time playing/talking to their children and had learned new parenting skills.
- Over 25 percent said they have enrolled in an educational program and 21 percent said enrolled in a job training program.

- More than 60 percent felt better about themselves as a parent.
- More than 60 percent said their expectations for their children had changed and that the expectations were more age-appropriate.
- Parents found home visits, information workshops, parent-child interaction workshops, and classes helpful to developing parenting strategies that better supported and encouraged their children.
- Parents responded most positively to the parent-child interaction workshops, in which children participated along with parents, and least positively towards classroom settings.

These results indicate that the program successfully met its goals. Not only do parents and prospective parents see themselves as better equipped to nurture and encourage their young children, they directly attribute these changes to attending FLEEP's workshops, classes, and discussion groups. Because parent-child interaction workshops were so favorably received, the program should consider using this format whenever possible to reach the objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Program Description

The Family Life Early Education Project (FLEEP) was created to educate parents on various aspects of child rearing. This program, funded by the state of Illinois and offered from September 1993 through August 1994, was directed by the Chicago Public Schools' Department of Early Childhood Education in cooperation with five service providers: the Chinese American Service League (a not-for-profit, community-based social service agency), the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development, Family Focus, Inc. (a private, not-for-profit family resource agency), the Mahalia Jackson School (a Chicago public school), and the Tesla Alternative High School for Girls (a Chicago public school).

The project sought both to foster greater self-esteem in parents and to assist them in acquiring and using techniques that promote their children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development, thus increasing the likelihood that their children would be well prepared for school. To accomplish this task, the program informed parents about the educational, health, and human service resources available to them; provided opportunities for them to interact with their children in activities that encouraged their children's growth; and worked to quickly detect any potential problems that might adversely affect children and their families. To evaluate the project, observers monitored program activities, surveyed participating parents, interviewed participants, and reviewed program attendance and activity records.

Program Objectives

Staff designed, implemented, and then assessed the effectiveness of an early childhood parent training model that would:

- create a supportive atmosphere in which parents could develop greater self-esteem.
- empower parents to be both more confident and effective in their roles as their children's primary, most important nurturers, teachers, and advocates.
- provide information on child health and development, family issues, parenting skills, safety, and nutrition to parents of young children.
- increase parents' understanding of how a solid parent-child relationship promotes a child's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional well-being.
- furnish parents with an opportunity to participate in developmentally appropriate activities with their children.
- encourage parents to use the educational, health, and human service resources available in their communities.

POPULATION SERVED

From September 1993 until August 1994, FLEEP served 351 parents. Eligible adults included single and married parents expecting their first child within three months, or parents whose young children were not already being served by other early intervention programs. Service providers recruited parents/prospective parents through school newsletters and publications, local newspaper notices, mailings, posting in hospitals and physician's offices, the assistance of public groups (e.g., churches and social services agencies), word-of-mouth, and community canvassing.

The table on page 3 summarizes the demographic information of the parents involved in the FLEEP program. Parents were overwhelmingly female and African-American; they were generally single, either not employed or seeking work, with an income of \$7,500 a year or less. The majority had either received their high school diploma/GED or were actively seeking it at Tesla Alternative High School for Girls.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND FORMAT

The five cooperating service providers used different formats to present material on child health and development, family issues, and parenting skills development. They held workshops, classes, small group discussions, and child-parent interaction seminars. They also hosted parent-child field trips. Some of this year's special activities included family and holiday celebrations, a Mother's Night at the Play and visits to the Shedd Aquarium and the Children's Museum. Also, participants at Tesla again worked with members of the Free Street Theater to learn how to better express their feelings and creativity and to increase their self-esteem.

To implement these activities, service providers often collaborated with local agencies or groups. They reached out to public health agencies, adult/vocational education agencies, social service agencies, libraries, hospitals, community colleges, universities, local business organizations, and museums. Because each provider recruited parents from the surrounding community, the needs and interests of participating parents varied dramatically. Therefore, each agency designed its program to specifically address the concerns and demands of its constituents.

Almost all participating parents (349) attended family relationship classes/workshops. Eighty-seven percent (305) attended child growth and development classes/workshops. Sixty-six parents (19 percent) received one-to-one consultations.

Parent-child interaction classes/workshops represented 80 percent of the total number of classes/workshops offered. Almost 80 percent of the participating parents attended the parent/child interaction workshops/classes. Interactive workshops on child growth and development, family relationships, and parenting skill development had the highest number of participants. The next most attended class/workshop was on preventing child abuse.

The Chinese American Service League

Chinese American organized its program to include not just an available parent but the entire family. In order to reach more families, specially planned workshops and field trips were scheduled on Saturdays. Parents attended discussion groups on Wednesdays. These were facilitated by a consultant from the Chicago Board of Education. This FLEEP site also established a family drop-in program with separate children's classes, divided into younger (children under three) and older (ages three to five) children.

Demographic Statistics for FLEEP Participants*

N = 351

A. Age of child/children

- 15% Expecting first child
- 22% Child below three year
- 29% Child 3 to 5 years
- 34% Children birth to 5

B. Sex of Parents

- 18% Male
- 82% Female

C. Age of Parents

- 48% Under 20 years old
- 22% 20 to 29
- 22% 30 to 39
- 8% 40 years or older

D. Current Marital Status

- 52% Never Married
- 44% Married
- 4% Divorced or separated

E. Parents' Education

- 13% 8th grade or less
- 54% Some high school, no diploma (not in school)
- 20% High School diploma/GED
- 2% Completed trade school
- 3% Some college, no degree
- 1% Associate degree
- 4% Bachelors degree
- 2% Graduate or professional
- 1% Unknown

F. Parents' Employment

- 43% Unemployed, not seeking employment
- 38% Unemployed, seeking employment
- 6% Employed less than 20 hours per week
- 13% Employed 20 hours per week or more

G. Family Structure

- 50% Both parents at home
- 42% Single parent household
- 4% Adult other than parent
- 3% Other

H. Ethnicity

- 0% White, non-Hispanic
- 57% Black, non-Hispanic
- 12% Hispanic
- 29% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 0% Native American/Alaskan Native
- 1% Multiracial

I. Family Income

- 24% Below \$5,000
- 24% \$5,000 to \$7,499
- 7% \$7,500 to \$9,999
- 13% \$10,000 to \$14,999
- 6% \$15,000 to \$19,999
- 6% \$20,000 to \$24,999
- 3% \$25,000 to \$29,999
- 2% \$30,000 to \$34,999
- 2% \$35,000 to \$39,999
- 2% \$40,000 to \$44,999
- 4% \$50,000 to and above
- 6% Unknown

*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

This service was available Tuesday through Saturday with each group meeting three times a week. The Resource Center, where parents and children were able to check out books, videotapes, cassette tapes, and toys, was open for 30 minutes during the children's sessions.

Parental discussions and workshops covered topics such as car safety seat rental, health and nutrition, children's sex education, children's eye care, and discipline. Some workshops were specifically targeted to facilitate parent-child interactions such as arts and crafts, music and movement, cooking, and science experiments. The numerous field trips parents attended, such as Lamb's Farm and the Chicago Children's Museum allowed them to spend time as a family in a relaxed manner. These trips also gave them a chance to experience more of American culture. To familiarize parents with the local schools, school representatives conducted workshops. Parents visited schools to observe different learning environments and to have their concerns and questions answered.

Family Focus, Inc.

This service provider offered two types of programs for FLEEP families. It provided both parenting classes and a drop-in program. Family Focus held parenting classes on different topics each lasting six to eight weeks. Classes had three distinct components: a parent class, a child activity segment, held simultaneously, and a parent-child interactive exercise. The center also provided a drop-in program several afternoons and evenings a week to which families could bring their children, ages birth through five years, to engage in age-appropriate activities.

In addition, this provider instituted a play-learn program for the State Prekindergarten parents. The play-learn program provided varied learning activities for the children while their parents attended classes. The parent classes addressed such topics as health and nutrition, setting appropriate limits, and child abuse/neglect. These sessions taught parents age-appropriate activities that they could do at home with their young children. The parent component addressed such topics as health and nutrition, setting appropriate limits, child abuse/neglect, as well as teaching parents age-appropriate activities that they could do at home with their young children.

Erikson Institute for Advanced Study of Child Development

The Erikson Institute, affiliated with Loyola University Chicago, instituted a family outreach program at two Chicago elementary schools, William W. Carter School and Woodson South. At each of the sites, program participants (mothers and fathers) met twice each week for informational or interactive sessions on topics ranging from parenting and birthing fears to drug abuse and the career value of an education. FLEEP members also participated in the STEP Program for Parenting, an on-going program that offered ideas on how to be a more effective parent. Some of the activities implemented for parents and children were designing and making simple garments, developing and assessing children's portfolios, children in their culture within the American culture, and a week-long celebration of the Annual African Festival.

Mahalia Jackson School

This service provider worked with 14 parents who met twice each week after school. The program focused on assisting parents in "unfolding their self-knowledge." During the year, participants completed a program called "Love Yourself, So You Can Love Others". A guest social worker led an ongoing program on empowerment. For the children, the emphasis was on motor skills development, eye-hand coordination, language, and creativity. The activities that were generated were designed to be easily reproduced at home.

Some of the themes presented for a month at a time were preparing your child to learn, parents as teachers, immunizations, building your child's self-esteem, and holiday survival. In addition to these activities, parents participated in planning field trips with the purpose of introducing the parents to their community and various city institutions that offered a variety of learning experiences for the child as well as the parents. Field trips were taken to Brookfield Zoo, the Children's Museum, and the Field Museum. In the process of planning the field trips, the parents identified community resources that were of benefit to them individually and then created a service directory for their reference. It was the belief of this service provider that knowledge is a tool of power and that self-esteem is directly tied to a sense of power over personal lives. In an effort to increase available resources, a comprehensive, unified system for delivery of mental health services is being planned. In pre- and post- assessment of parental needs and self-perception, parents revealed that they are interacting more with their children using appropriate activities and are more involved in reading activities with their children. Parents also reported using the workshop materials more and being more open to getting help.

Tesla Alternative High School for Girls

Tesla was the largest service provider with 150 participants. Three participating public elementary schools (Wadsworth, Cole, and Dumas) and one community organization (Woodlawn Organization Parenting Program) joined Tesla in implementing this program. Both male and female students participated along with other family members and friends. During the shortened school year at Tesla, students with infants and/or toddlers attended a two-week lab in which the students were given instructions on the care of their children. Another component to this provider's program was the Summer Parenteen Program. The goals of the program were to enable the participants to become more aware of their feelings, enhance communication skills, build self-esteem, practice conflict resolution, nurture infants, and learn how to exercise abstinence. Some of the activities that supported these program goals were discussions, visualizations - creating a safe place, sharing something special about self, conflict resolution, identifying pain, four-year goals, and nursery rhymes and finger plays. Violence was discussed in some sessions as well as the importance of identifying, setting, and achieving major goals in life before beginning a family. The Woodlawn Organization Parenting Program provided service to adult parents who were former addicts. Their children were cared for during the meetings.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Participants completed evaluation questionnaires developed by the State Board of Education after home visits or a series of classes and at the end of the program year.

Participants reported on these forms that the program had made a difference in their lives. As a result of having participated in the FLEEP program:

- Almost two-thirds of the participants saw themselves as better parents, concluding that they understood more fully the needs of their children.
- More than 80 percent of the respondents reported knowing more about how to discipline their children by setting appropriate limits.
- Over 50 percent said they now know the appropriate age to provide immunizations and what community services are available.
- One-fourth know more about the availability of substance abuse programs.
- Over 80 percent reported learning new ideas about raising children and spend more time playing/talking with their children.
- Almost 70 percent said they understand how their children grow and develop.
- Over half of the participants reported that they read more often to their children and have an improved attitude toward school and parent-school partnerships.
- Most importantly, 75 percent of the respondents were more confident in their role as their children's most important teacher and encouraged their children more often as a result of having participated in the program.

Overall, participants indicated that they thoroughly enjoyed the program and were interested in continuing if given the opportunity. Most reported that they now felt better equipped to provide a more suitable environment, health care, and age appropriate activities for their children. Participants also commented that they could provide their children with better health and nutrition. Parents remarked that they had increased the time they spent interacting with and reading to their children. Most notably, respondents stated that they were trying to integrate new parenting skills and techniques at home.

Parents favored parent-child interaction projects over all other formats. These interactive activities provided parents with direct experiences to try appropriate parenting skills. Individual comments showed that parents appreciated the opportunity to work closely with their children in these settings. They also indicated that these sessions provided them with tangible examples that they could follow at home.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the whole, the program was a success. Parents concluded that they had gained valuable parenting skills and increased their knowledge of parenting issues and resources. In addition, they acknowledged that they spent more time interacting with their children at home, attributing this change to the program. Parents also suggested that they were now able to set more appropriate limits and provide more age-appropriate activities for their children. Overall, the evaluation questionnaires indicated that parents enjoyed the program.

On the basis of the above findings, FLEEP should be continued and expanded as funding permits. Many individuals not receiving services from other sources felt supported, empowered, and encouraged to engage with their children using more constructive and age-appropriate ways. However, evaluation results strongly suggest that the program could be improved by changing the predominant format of learning experiences, the targeted population, and the evaluation process itself.

Because parents responded most favorably to "hands-on" activities that enabled them to interact positively with their children in a semi-structured environment, service agencies might plan more activities that follow this format. Providers could expand child-parent interaction activities by: 1) adding play days; 2) developing music and art activities; 3) increasing the number and kind of existing activities, (e.g., field trips); and 4) expanding the program time allotted to the parents and children, as well as providing more materials and literature.

Again this year, some providers have included fathers in the program activities and/or offered special father sessions. All service providers should integrate this feature and encourage inclusion of other caregivers important to the children. Although some centers incorporated these other care providers, all centers should be encouraged to do so.

Parents, evaluation staff, and service agencies found the evaluation questionnaire confusing and cumbersome. They also noted that it did not request important information about strengths and weaknesses or suggestions for improvement. ISBE should consider redesigning their questionnaire to better accommodate each program's individual format and to provide more useful evaluation information. The questionnaire can be improved in four areas:

- 1) Because many program sessions addressed multiple topics, providers found it difficult to separate program time into categories required by the questionnaire. Categories often seemed indistinguishable from one from another, for instance, childbirth/growth was hard to differentiate from pre/postnatal care.
- 2) Some groups met every day, making it unrealistic to fill out evaluation forms after every session. Additionally, because the questionnaire was designed to be workshop- or class-specific, questions were difficult to answer, and thus responses were difficult to interpret when filled out for other kinds of activities.
- 3) The questionnaire did not specifically ask participants if they wished to continue with the program. This information would indicate how effective the program was for participants. There was also no means by which parents could look back over the entire program and select the part(s) of the program that they found most helpful.

- 4) The questionnaire's format did not allow the parents space to comment on any of the program's weak points. Such information is vital to improving the program.

By redesigning the questionnaire to better assess the needs, implementation, and effectiveness of the program, not only would the entire evaluation process be simplified, but the information gained could be more readily used to improve the program.

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